

## **WA Minimum Wage Workers Wait for News of an Hourly Raise**

### **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : October 13, 2010 at 5:29 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - Washington Governor Chris Gregoire has delayed her annual minimum-wage announcement for the upcoming year until this week. The Washington Attorney General, Rob McKenna, believes there hasn't been enough change in the Consumer Price Index to justify a wage increase, although last month Oregon looked at the same data, and will increase its minimum wage by ten cents an hour.

John Burbank, executive director of the *Economic Opportunity Institute* in Seattle, says the Washington law has been in effect since 1998, and he thinks the AG is pandering to conservative business groups.

"We have had 1.4 percent inflation over the previous 12 months. So legally the state is bound to increase the minimum wage, come January 1. So, that's what we would expect that the Governor would do, in accordance with the law."

Burbank says the decision will affect about 300,000 Washington workers paid at or near minimum wage. He says that with the recession, the ranks of low-paid and part-time workers have swelled, and the Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) is built into the state law for good reason.

"Over the long run it's quite important, and that's the whole point about having the automatic COLA, is that it enables workers to keep up with inflation over time. And if we miss one year and we miss another year, then suddenly, they're falling further and further behind."

At issue is a Consumer Price Index decrease two years ago: The current year's increase has not surpassed it, so the AG says wages should hold steady. His critics say that's a narrow interpretation of the law's intent. Governor Gregoire makes the final decision. It's expected by Friday. The increase would be 10 or 12 cents an hour, if it happens.

Washington has the highest minimum wage of any state at \$8.55 per hour, although Burbank says if wages had truly kept pace with inflation, it would have topped \$10 an hour by now.